Eldritch Happenstance:

Coincidence Through Supernatural Intervention

Lionel Hartley

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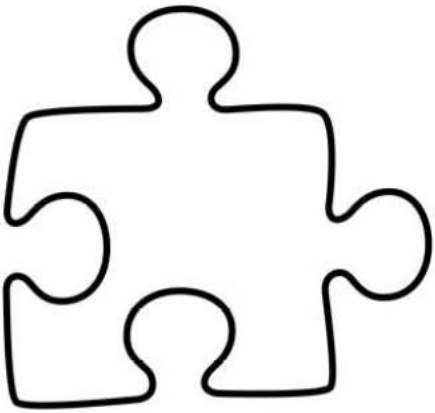

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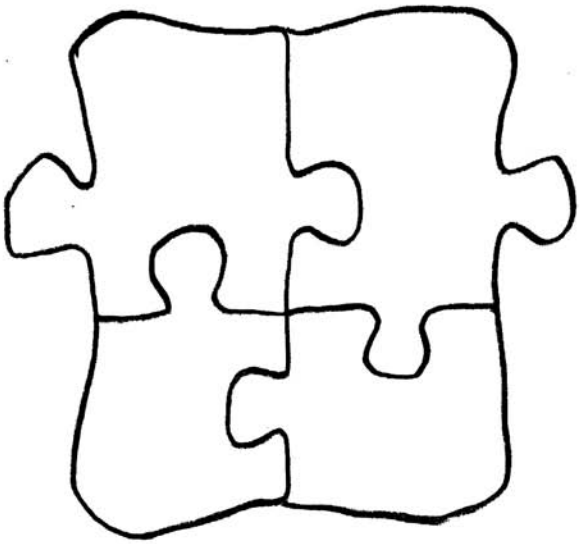
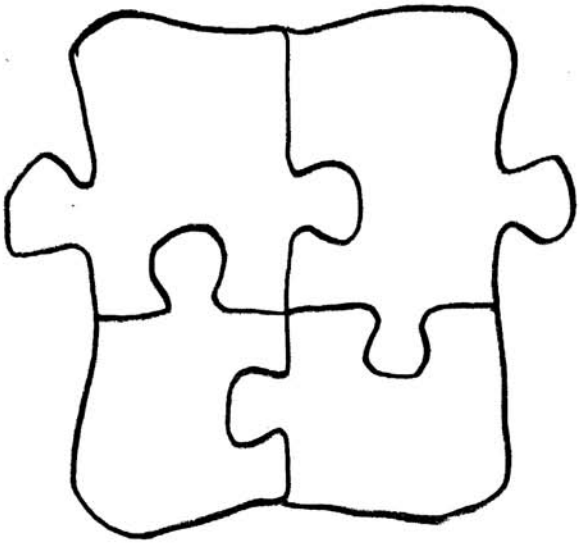




Introduction

Coincidence is when God chooses to remain anonymous. I believe there are times that he sends events, things or people to remind us of his watch-care.

This known as *'eldritch happenstance'*, which is a 'coincidence through supernatural intervention'.

Are coincidences God's teachers?

What are some examples of coincidences that cannot be explained other than by Divine intervention?

Is there a lesson to be learned?

Should we actively look for the Divine touch in coincidences?

Is there a danger in attributing all coincidences to God?

Although this topic is broad, in this book your author will attempt to answer some of these questions.

Tony Evans wrote, "There are many times in our lives when God is nowhere to be found. There are many times when we look for God, but He cannot be located. There are many times when it seems like God is letting things happen to you and me that He wouldn't allow if He loved us and cared about us. But there is a term for God's invisibility, when He cannot be located. That term is His providence, His unseen hand at work."

"When you know the truth of God's sovereign control, and how He providentially works in history, you'll be able to move through life successfully even when it's quiet spiritually. That's because you know even though you don't see, feel, or hear from God, you know He is pulling the strings behind the scenes."

"Because God is the Puppet-Master, from now on you should no longer say the devil is in the details. Once you know about the providence of God, you need to now say God is in the details."

I suggest that we can praise God for the miraculous ways that He silently intervenes in our lives, which ought to demonstrate to us His intimate loving care and concern.

When coincidences happen, when the unexplainable occurs, when a chain of circumstances astonishes us, may we look to recognise God's handiwork and providence and give Him our grateful praise and thanks.

— Lionel Hartley, 2025

ROSEMARY

Chapter 1: Are Coincidences God's Teachers?

Years ago, sadly for my wife, Rosemary, she was in hospital for her 60th birthday.

While I was there, visiting her, I saw out of the window a sight that can only be described as happenstance.

I drew her attention to it and we both watched as an aerobatic 'plane circled slowly overhead, writing in the sky in bold white lettering, the words, *"Happy Birthday, Rosemary"*.

I confessed to her that I had neither organised nor paid for such an extravagant gesture, but was delighted when I observed how it lifted her spirits.

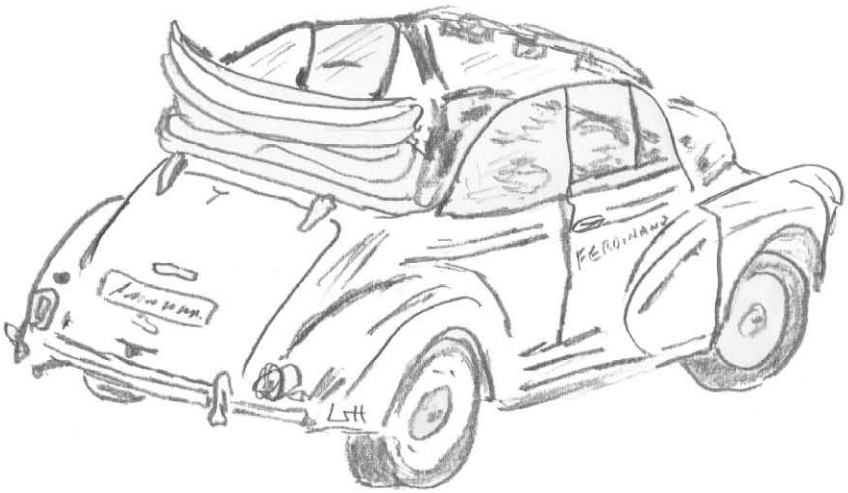
Are coincidences God's teachers?

New Zealand theologian, Richie Way wrote, "Coincidences are God's Servants".

In the mid 1800s, John Drummond (1851-

1897) wrote, "Nothing that happens in the world happens by chance. God is a God of order. Everything is arranged upon definite principles and never at random".

Back in the 1970s and 1980s in Christchurch, New Zealand, I owned several vehicles, one of which was a Morris Minor Convertible sports car affectionately named 'Ferdinand'.



One day when I went to start Ferdinand before leaving home, the starter cable broke.

Now, the starter on this model was a switch concealed under the dashboard with a short cable

leading to a round knob on the centre section of the instrument panel. Pulling on the knob would start the car, however on this day the knob came out in my hand when the cable broke. So the car just could not start.

I knew that I wouldn't have a replacement cable in my "man-shed" so I looked for something that would provide a temporary substitute. I found a short length of fine chain that looked as though it might do the job, at least to get me started for the day.

Conveniently, on the end of the chain was a cylindrical-shaped knob. It was a white and blue porcelain handle from an overhead toilet cistern of the Victorian era. It had the word "Pull" in elaborate printing emblazoned on it.

As the chain was too thick to traverse through the hole in the instrument panel where the original knob had been, I left it hanging below the dashboard and started the car by pulling down on the porcelain handle. It worked surprisingly well.

Now, being a lazy sort of fellow, as often has happened when I effect a temporary repair on something, the chain-pull starter became a permanent

fixture.

Sometime later, when I took the car to have a semi-annual inspection for registration, the inspector noticed that the starter knob was missing, and asked how to start the car.

I responded by saying, "Just pull the chain!"

The inspector burst out laughing and called a colleague to share in the humour of the situation. For several long minutes they sat together in the car laughing and repeatedly starting and stopping the engine, each pull of the starter followed by peals of laughter.

Eventually, inspection forgotten, they sent me on my way with an un-inspected vehicle, but with the ticket for a fully approved vehicle inspection.

A few years later I sold the car with the toilet-flush starter still in use.

Now I would like to bring you forward in time to the year 2009. At this time I was living in here Australia. It was while driving a Holden Commodore that, once again, I had a problem with a starter switch. I managed to start the car by running a wire from the

battery to the starter solenoid (the little device that controls the starter motor).

Obviously having to open the car bonnet to start the car meant that this could never be more than a very impermanent resolution to the problem.

I took the car to an auto-electrician in the town of Murwillumbah to effect a more permanent solution. While discussing the dilemma with the mechanic, I lightened the moment by relating to him the true story that I have just shared with you.

As I told him, instead of chuckling along as I expected, his eyes opened wide and he shook his head in disbelief.

"So this was in Christchurch about thirty years ago?" he asked in confirmation.

I replied in the affirmative.

"Then let me tell you a story," he ventured.

"My wife is a New Zealander," he began. "In Christchurch, about thirty years ago, she bought a Morris Minor Convertible. The starter was, as you have described, the porcelain handle from a Victorian

overhead toilet cistern.

She was too embarrassed to tell the seller of the vehicle that she felt uncomfortable driving a car with a toilet-flush starter, so as soon as possible she had it replaced by a conventional starter.

She kept the porcelain handle as a souvenir and we still have it hanging in our toilet cubicle at home as a decoration. I'm happy to email to you a photo of it if you wish."

Now it was my turn to sport wide-open eyes and to shake my head in wonderment. A subsequent email with a photograph confirmed the validity of the amazing co-incidence linked by 1500 miles and 3 decades.

Chapter 2: Miniature Coincidence

Who would have thought that a single drop of paint could so dramatically change lives?

Pastor John T. Anderson tells of Kathleen McCormack, who stopped at an ice cream shop in Perth, Western Australia years ago, for her favourite lime juice and soda drink.

Her parents had moved there from England because of the economic stresses following the first World War.

Now it was World War II, and often servicemen on leave would come to the ice cream shop for refreshment. It happened that one day while the ice-cream shop was undergoing some remodelling that a drop of paint fell from a worker's brush, splat, right on the uniform of John Heeren, an American sailor. Kathleen scurried to find some cleaning fluid to remove the paint.

Afterward, John asked Kathleen if he could escort her home, but she declined. However, a few

weeks later they saw each other again at a local function and John made his request again. This time Kathleen said, "Yes." Romance blossomed and John and Kathleen exchanged marriage vows on February 9, 1945.

When she was a young girl, Kathleen had sat on the beach and watched the large passenger ships coming and going from the port city of Freemantle. She dreamed that one day she would be on one of those ships.

This dream came true when on April 21, 1946, Kathleen herself boarded a ship, along with numerous other Australian war brides, to go to America to be with her beloved John. Their lives were full as they raised a family and worked there in America, and were active members in their local Seventh-day Adventist Church.

How great and good is our God, Who loved us so much He sent His Son Jesus Christ to shed His lifeblood on Calvary and bring the hope of redemption to us. Not only did He pay the price for sin, but He has been involved in our daily affairs throughout our lives.

What may appear to be mere happenstance or even a tragedy turns out to be divine direction; the hand of the Almighty steering the ship of our destiny. So it was for Kathleen and the drop of paint. So it is for every single one of us. So it is for the whole world as our loving God has turned the tragedy of sin to the triumph of His grace.

Kathleen was a "war bride," a member of a special sorority of women who found love during a time of chaos and upheaval. Beauty came from ashes. From the soil of turmoil and strife grew the lovely flower of devotion and affection.

In a sense, she stands for all of us. We are all "war brides." The Bible, which opens our eyes to the "bigger picture" of what life is about, tells us that we are all involved in a war.

It's not necessarily a physical battle as was

World War II. There may not be tanks and rifles, submarines and battleships. But make no mistake about it; we're in a war; a war with huge consequences and longer-lasting effects than even World War II.

This war, the battle between good and evil, began in heaven and was transferred down to this earth. The scarred surface of this planet tells us of millennia of conflict that have transpired.

Though the battle rages as it did during Kathleen's younger years, there is still opportunity for good to exist. Love can bloom and blossom even in conflict. For us, the "good out of the bad" is the chance to meet Jesus, the Lord of all.

It's the opportunity to have a love relationship with Him Who is the Sovereign of the universe. The so-called "little things," as was that drop of paint in Kathleen's life and the porcelain toilet-chain handle, we experience also, as God patiently leads and directs in our lives.

We have the glorious calling of becoming the "bride," which is simply another way of describing the community of believers who accept Christ's proposal of spiritual marriage to Him.

One day a shout of victory will pierce the heavens, as it is acknowledged that the wedding is to take place. "The bride has made herself ready" will be the glad announcement, and the heavenly Groom will begin His descent to pick up His beloved and escort her to the home He has prepared for her.

You and I can be in that group. We can be the "war bride" that will go to the destination He has chosen.

We can be like Kathleen, sitting on the beach dreaming, "Someday, I'll be on one of those ships." That day came for her; it will one day come for us.

We can dream now about leaving, but one day it will most certainly come true.

Chapter 3: A Twist of Fate?

Donald E. and Vesta W. Mansell in *'Sure As The Dawn'* tell us that, "Many years ago a house near Bucyrus, Ohio, was struck by lightning.

Faster than it takes to tell it, the bolt burned a path down the eaves of the house, through the rain gutter, and into the cistern. Luckily the house was not set afire.

Not long after the storm, one of the children was sent to fetch a pail of water and discovered that the cistern was dry. Examination showed that the bolt [of lightning] had burned a hole in the bottom of the cistern, causing the water to leak out.

When the father went down to plug the leak, he heard the sound of gurgling water. Investigating further, he discovered an under ground stream.

A well was dug where the cistern had been, and from that day on the family had an abundance of cold, clear, pure water. They lost a cistern but gained a never-failing source of the life-giving beverage."

It seems that when we are down to nothing, God is up to something!

Dan Betzer in the Pentecostal Evangelical Leadership magazine tells us that late one evening a professor sat at his desk working on the next day's lectures. He shuffled through the papers and mail placed there by his housekeeper.

He began to throw them in the wastebasket when one magazine, not even addressed to him but delivered to his office by mistake, caught his attention. It fell open to an article titled "The Needs of the Congo Mission."

The professor began reading it idly, but then he was consumed by these words: *"The need is great here. We have no one to work the northern province of Gabon in the central Congo. And it is my prayer as I write this article that God will lay His hand on one, one on whom, already, the Master's eyes have been cast, that he or she shall be called to this place to help us."*

The professor closed the magazine and wrote

in his diary: "My search is over." he gave himself to go to the Congo.

The professor's name was Albert Schweitzer. That little article, hidden in a periodical intended for someone else, was placed by accident in Schweitzer's mailbox. By chance his housekeeper put the magazine on the professor's desk.

By chance he noticed the title, which seemed to leap out at him.

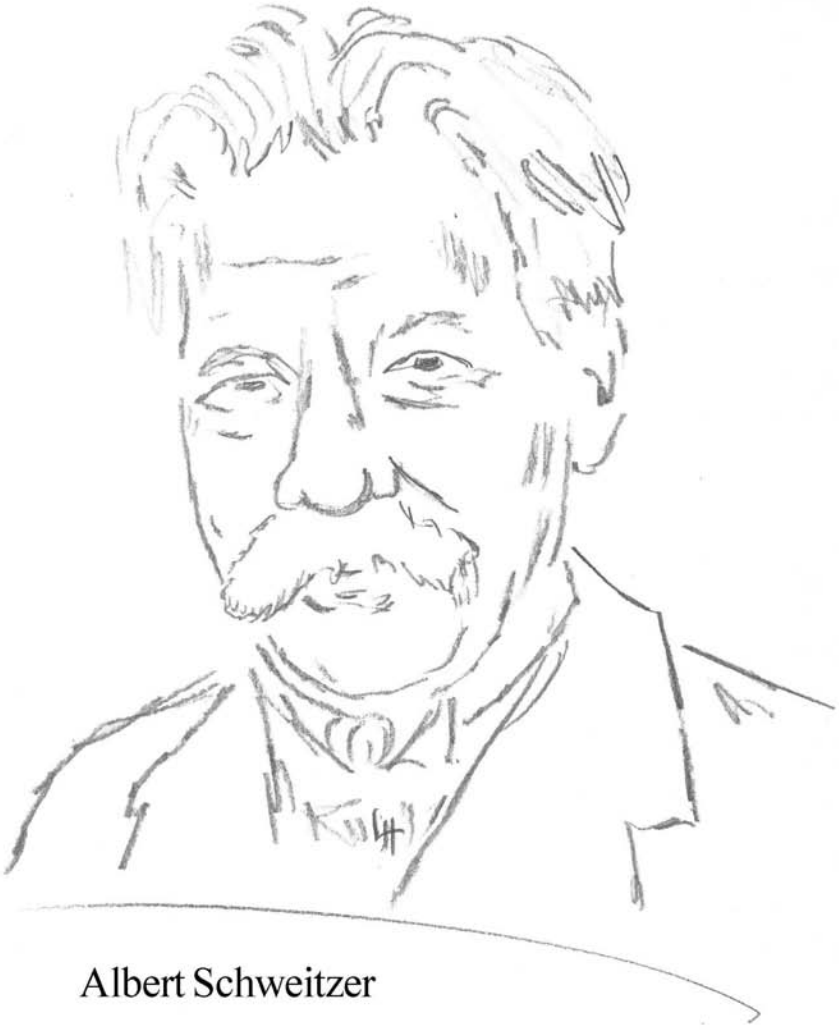
By chanced the magazine fell open to the life-changing article.

By chance he paused to read it.

Dr. Schweitzer became a worker in a humanitarian work nearly unmatched in human history.

Was this just a twist of fate? Was this by chance? Was this coincidence? Was this a demonstration of Providence (a manifestation of God's care for His creation)?

Or was it eldritch happenstance, coincidence through supernatural intervention?



Albert Schweitzer

Chapter 4: Biblical Coincidences

H. Carl Shank in 'Going Deeper With God Every Day' wrote, "Make God your Lord of time. Obviously, God rules all time and determines the end from the beginning and the middle also.

But making God Lord of the time He gives me means I live my life centred on Him and His will. If every minute of every day is God's, then I will be consciously aware that I live under His all-seeing and all-knowing eye.

Nothing is left to chance or luck or coincidence. Every planned and every unplanned activity is under God's control. Living life for his honour and glory becomes my minute-by-minute destiny, not a vain or distant hope. Every minute becomes precious and important".

"And he sendeth forth two of his disciples, and saith unto them, Go ye into the city, and there shall meet you a man bearing a pitcher of water:

follow him. And wheresoever he shall go in, say ye to the goodman of the house, The Master saith, Where is the guestchamber, where I shall eat the Passover with my disciples?

And he will show you a large upper room furnished and prepared: there make ready for us.

And his disciples went forth, and came into the city, and found as he had said unto them: and they made ready the Passover" (Mark 14:13-16).

Theology aside for a moment, think about the coincidences of this.

It takes time to travel by foot to any city. It is Passover and the city is bustling with people, however, when they arrive they see a man bearing a pitcher of water.

Was this man walking around in circles for hours just waiting for the disciples to notice him?

I hardly think so. And yet here he was, walking past, at the very instant the disciples were looking for him.

Was it coincidence that it was a man carrying

the water container, a chore usually reserved at that time for women?

Was it coincidence that when they followed him he was going to the same place that they were to go?

Was it coincidence that this place had an upper room for the disciples to prepare for the Passover?

Was it coincidence that room was furnished and prepared?

Verse 16 says, "And his disciples went forth, and came into the city, and found as he had said unto them".

In Mark Chapter 11 we read of another supposed coincidence. "And when they came nigh to Jerusalem, unto Bethphage and Bethany, at the mount of Olives, he sendeth forth two of his disciples, and saith unto them, Go your way into the village over against you: and as soon as ye be entered into it, ye shall find a colt tied, whereon never man sat; loose him, and bring him.

And if any man say unto you, Why do ye this? say ye that the Lord hath need of him; and straightway

he will send him hither.

And they went their way, and found the colt tied by the door without in a place where two ways met; and they loose him. And certain of them that stood there said unto them, What do ye, loosing the colt?

And they said unto them even as Jesus had commanded: and they let them go. And they brought the colt to Jesus, and cast their garments on him; and he sat upon him" (Mark 11:1-7).

Notice the specifics: Verse 2 - as soon as ye be entered into the village, not later in the day, not tomorrow, not after an hour or so of searching, but 'as soon as'.

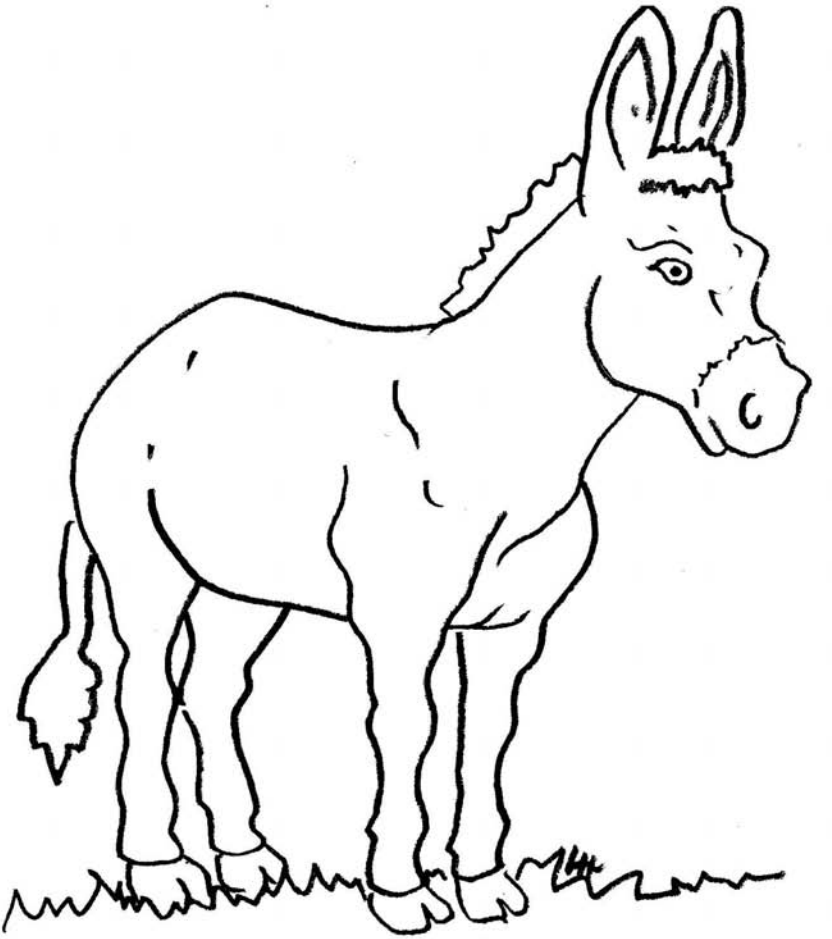
It was a colt, a young ass, a foal or filly, not a mature animal not a white horse as would be expected for a king's dramatic entry, but a young untamed colt. Now, I have, years ago, ridden both horses and a donkey, but never a young untamed one.

Verse three says that if anyone asks certain words then here is the response. And that is exactly the way it happened.

Furthermore the words in response, "the Lord

hath need of him", was sufficient to allow them to take the colt without any hindrance to give it to Jesus.

I suggest that biblical coincidences are God's teachers.



Chapter 5: Reward-bearing Coincidences

Ed Koper tells us that he was very proud of his daughter Emily.

At only nine years old, she had been carefully saving her allowance money all year and trying to earn extra money by doing small jobs around the neighbourhood.

'Emily was determined to save enough to buy a girl's mountain bike, an item for which she'd been longing, and she'd been faithfully putting her money away since the beginning of the year.

"How're you doing, honey?" Ed asked soon after Thanksgiving. He knew she had hoped to have all the money she needed by the end of the year.

"I have forty-nine dollars, Daddy," she said. "I'm not sure if I'm going to make it."

"You've worked so hard," Ed said encouragingly. "Keep it up. But you know that you can have your pick from my bicycle collection."

Thanks, Daddy. But your bikes are so old."

He smiled to himself because he knew she was right. As a collector of vintage bicycles, all his girls' bikes were 1950s models. Not the kind a kid would choose today.

When the Christmas season arrived, Emily and her dad went comparison shopping, and she saw several less expensive bikes for which she thought she'd have to settle. As they left one store, she noticed a Salvation Army volunteer ringing his bell by a big kettle. "Can we give them something, Daddy?" she asked.

"Sorry, Em, I'm out of change," Ed replied.

Emily continued to work hard all through December, and it seemed she might make her goal after all. Then suddenly one day, she came downstairs to the kitchen and made an announcement to her mother.

"Mom," she said hesitantly, "you know all the money I've been saving?"

"Yes, dear," smiled Ed's wife, Diane.

"God told me to give it to the poor people."

Diane knelt down to Emily's level. "That's a very kind thought, sweetheart. But you've been saving all year. Maybe you could give some of it."

Emily shook her head vigorously. "God said all."

When they saw she was serious, they gave her various suggestions about where she could contribute.

But Emily had received specific instructions, and so one cold Sunday morning before Christmas, with little fanfare, she handed her total savings of $58 to a surprised and grateful Salvation Army volunteer.

Moved by Emily's selflessness, Ed suddenly noticed that a local car dealer was collecting used bicycles to refurbish and give to poor children for Christmas. And he realized that if his nine-year-old daughter could give away all her money, he could certainly give up one bike from hiscollection.

As he picked up a shiny but old-fashioned kid's bike from the line in the garage, it seemed as if a second bicycle in the line took on a glow. Should he give a second bike? No, certainly the one would be enough.

But as Ed got to his car, he couldn't shake the feeling that he should donate that second bike as well. And if Emily could follow heavenly instructions, Ed decided he could, too.

He turned back and loaded the second bike into the trunk, then took off for the dealership.

When he delivered the bikes, the car dealer thanked him and said, "You're making two kids very happy, Mr. Koper. And here are your tickets."

"Tickets?" Ed asked.

"Yes. For each bike donated we're giving away one chance to win a brand new men's 21-speed mountain bike from a local bike shop. So here are your tickets for two chances."

Why wasn't Ed surprised when that second ticket won the bike? "I can't believe you won!" laughed Diane, delighted.

"I didn't," he said. "It's pretty clear that Emily did." And why wasn't he surprised when the bike dealer happily substituted a gorgeous new girl's mountain bike for the man's bike advertised?'

Ed goes on to say, 'Coincidence? Maybe. I like to think it was God's way of rewarding a little girl for a sacrifice beyond her years-while giving her dad a lesson in charity and the power of the Lord.'

"Give, and it shall be given unto you; good measure, pressed down, and shaken together, and running over, shall men give into your bosom. For with the same measure that ye mete withal it shall be measured to you again" (Luke 6:38).

His name was Fleming, and he was a poor Scottish farmer.

One day, while trying to eke out a living for his family, he heard a cry for help coming from a nearby bog.

He dropped his tools and ran to the bog. There, mired to his waist in black muck, was a terrified boy, screaming and struggling to free himself.

Farmer Fleming saved the lad from what could have been a slow and terrifying death.

The next day, a fancy carriage pulled up to the

Scotsman's sparse surroundings. An elegantly dressed nobleman stepped out and introduced himself as the father of the boy Farmer Fleming had saved.

"I want to repay you," said the nobleman. "You saved my son's life." "No, I can't accept payment for what I did," the Scottish farmer replied, waving off the offer. At that moment, the farmer's own son came to the door of the family hovel. "Is that your son?" the nobleman asked. "Yes," the farmer replied proudly.

"I'll make you a deal. Let me take him and give him a good education. If the lad is anything like his father, he'll grow to a man you can be proud of."

And that he did. In time, Farmer Fleming's son graduated from St. Mary's Hospital Medical School in London, and went on to become known throughout the world as the noted Sir Alexander Fleming, the discoverer of Penicillin.

Years afterward, the nobleman's son was stricken with pneumonia. What saved him? Penicillin.

The name of the nobleman? Lord Randolph Churchill. His son's name? Sir Winston Churchill.

A number of years ago, my wife and I worked for a number of years as volunteers for a church organisation and received a stipend of $35 each a week.

As this was our total income to support a family of five, we were very cautious when it came to spending money.

One day, as we were looking in a second-hand shop for a certain item, I happened to pick up a large battery-operated torch (flashlight) and absent-mindedly switched it on.

To my surprise it worked, although 1.) it was priced at only 50 cents, and 2.) it felt far too light to have batteries in it.

Being compulsively curious I looked inside to find six re-chargeable D-size batteries. At that time these very lightweight batteries retailed for about $15.00 each.

As my mind calculated the value of this 50-cent treasure, another customer asked if I was going to

buy the torch, as he was interested in it if I didn't buy it. I explained that I was really only interested in the batteries inside and was contemplating suggesting we share the cost (as 50c was all I had), but I felt a twinge of conscience. I remembered Jesus' story of the treasure hid in a field (Matthew 13:44*) and recalled that the point of the story *was not* about a man diddling his neighbour out of a field worth more than it's surface value.

I suggested that the other customer come with me to the shopkeeper and perhaps we could work something out.

I explained to the shopkeeper that the torch was really valued at over $100 dollars but he said that as it was priced at 50c, whichever of us purchased it could have it for that price.

The other customer then whispered to me, "seeing you saw it first, if you buy it for 50c and remove the batteries for yourself, I will buy it from

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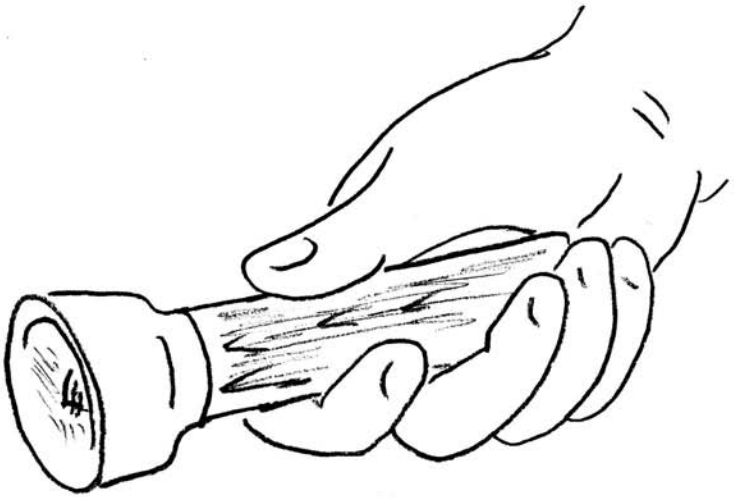
* "Again, the kingdom of heaven is like unto treasure hid in a field; the which when a man hath found, he hideth, and for joy thereof goeth and selleth all that he hath, and buyeth that field" (Matthew 13:44) .

you for $1.00."

It was then I saw the meaning of Jesus' parable. God has a treasure for us. Its value is more than we can possibly imagine. It will cost us everything to get it, yet we will gain everything — and more — by accepting it. I invite you to re-read Jesus' parable and follow His advice today.

And for the curious, yes, I purchased the torch with my last 50c and thanked God for six free re-chargeable batteries and a doubling of the contents of my purse.



Chapter 6: Miracle or Coincidence?

23 January 2024 was a series of miracles (or were they coincidences?).

I had been waiting almost a year for a neurology appointment because of a small cyst or similar growth in my brain, accused of a range of unpleasant symptoms. Finally, I was given a 1:00pm appointment that day to see a neurologist at a Gold Coast hospital.

Observation number 1. Being an afternoon appointment, although the day was cloudy, we had opportunity to wash our weekly laundry before going.

After pegging the washing on the clothesline, my wife Rosemary and I left early to take a bus to the railway station, from there to take a train to another station, to then finally to take a light-rail tram to the hospital.

Observation number 2. Even though our bus was running several minutes late, we were still in plenty time for the train and, along with a number of

other travellers, waited patiently on platform number one as directed.

Unfortunately, due to track works, to the surprise of the platform staff, the train pulled up at a different platform, separated by an overhead walkway.

Those of us waiting at the advertised platform hastily struggled to get to the other platform.

The ambulatory ones took to the stairs and crossed over to the other platform in record time. Being less mobile, we had to traverse two ramps to get to the overhead gantry, then another two ramps to descent to the other platform. The train left before we had a chance to get there.

The station attendant apologized profusely, but explained that they do not inform him until two minutes before a train arrives, as to which platform it will arrive. We could wait for the next train in about half-an-hour, but again we would only have less than two minutes to get from one platform to the other depending at which platform the train arrives.

This was a risk we couldn't take so decided to go by 'bus to another station, one that has a centre

platform for trains using either track.

Observation number 3. Almost immediately a 'bus arrived and we boarded it for the continuation of our journey.

Observation number 4. Despite the bus stopping frequently and taking a very circuitous route, we got to the next station before the train arrived. We waited there for the next train, boarded it and were taken to the station from where the tram was to depart.

Already 30 minutes late, we arrived at the light-rail tram station only to be advised over the public address system that the tram to the hospital was running late, 'due to an incident on the track'.

Observation number 5. When we finally clocked in at the hospital for my appointment, the digital receipt showed that our arrival time for our one-o'clock appointment was exactly one o'clock, to the second.

Observation number 6. The test results revealed that the cyst was not sinister and, until a cause could be found, I would only require treatment for symptoms.

Observation number 7. The weather turned sour in the afternoon and presaging ominous storm clouds were brewing. However, after our uneventful return tram, train and 'bus journeys, we arrived home in sufficient time to bring in the washing before it rained.

In February that year, I put the following entry in my journal: According to my appointment diary, I had this week, among several other appointments each day, an appointment with our new pastor who requested a getting-to-know-each-other one-on-one conversation as I had a number of responsibilities at the church.

This was scheduled for 1pm. Tuesday. On Thursday at 1pm. I had promised my son that I would be present while an electrician attended his rental property for some maintenance.

Around midday on Monday I received a phone call from my son. "I have a problem," he said, "The electrician cannot come on Thursday, but can come Tuesday. Can you possibly be there 1pm. on Tuesday?"

I explained that I had an appointment with the pastor but if I could somehow get his contact details, I would ask him if we could change it. My son said that he would phone back in a few minutes.

I prayed out loud, "Lord, how can I get Pastor Jacob's 'phone number? Perhaps [another church member] may have it. Amen."

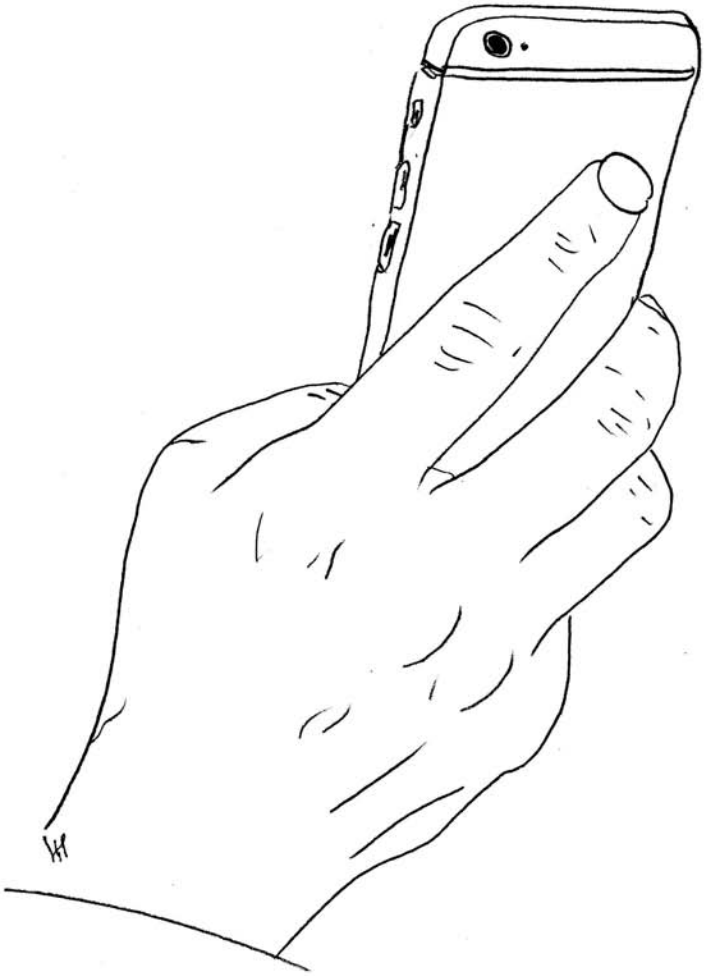
Just as I said Amen, my 'phone rang again and it wasn't my son's number that appeared on the screen but one that I didn't recognise.

The voice on the 'phone said, "Hi Lionel, Pastor Jacob here. I am now using a new digital calendar that has the week staring on Monday rather than Sunday. I have changed it to start the week on Sunday, but the calendar has moved all my appointments to different days and as I have added more appointments, clashes appear. Is it possible for us to meet on Wednesday or Thursday instead?"

I assured him of my approval of the change and saved his number to my 'phone contacts list.

A few minutes later when my son rang back, I was able to share with him God's providence and the

instant answer to prayer.



Chapter 7: Deferred Coincidences

Muscovite Will Stewart in January 2008 wrote in the '*Telegraph*' a touching story from Russia.

'When Anna Kozlov saw the elderly man clambering out of a car in her home village of Borovlyanka in Siberia, she stopped dead in her tracks, convinced that her eyes were playing tricks.

There, in front of her, was Boris, the man she had fallen in love with and married 60 years earlier. The last time she had seen him was three days after their wedding, when she kissed him goodbye and sent him off to rejoin his Red Army unit.

By the time he returned, Anna was gone, consigned by Stalin's purges to internal exile in Siberia with the rest of her family as an enemy of the people. They left no forwarding address.

Frantic, Boris tried everything he could to find his young bride, but it was no good - she was gone. More than 50 years later, they were reunited, an extraordinary coincidence leading them both to return

to their home village on the same day.

"I thought my eyes were playing games with me," Anna said.

"I saw this familiar looking man approaching me, his eyes gazing at me. My heart jumped. I knew it was him. I was crying with joy."

Boris, now 80, had returned to visit his parents' grave. As he stepped from the car, he saw Anna standing by her old house, where they had lived for the few days after the wedding. "I ran up to her and said: 'My darling, I've been waiting for you for so long. My wife, my life …' "

They stayed up all night, talking about all that had happened to them and the cruel circumstances that tore them apart.

They met when he was secretary of the Young Communists and made a speech in the village. Afterwards she was standing with friends, but he had eyes only for her. Her father had been purged by Stalin before the war for refusing to work in a collective farm, but Boris did not care. She was too beautiful for words. "I loved her and would always defend her,"

he recalled.

The romance blossomed. When he came home from the front, she was always there, waiting. In 1946 they married. It was a hasty wedding and they could not afford anything grand in those hard years after the war. Three days later, he had to return to his unit.

"We kissed goodbye - but I never expected we wouldn't see each other for more than half a century," Anna said.

A little while later, the state caught up with her. Like her father, she was branded an enemy of the people and forced with the rest of her family into internal exile in Siberia.

On his return to their village, Boris was distraught. "Nobody knew where they were or what had happened to Anna. That's how we lost any track of each other," he said.

In their new village, Anna's mother resolved that the girl should remarry. She told her that Boris had remarried. "She said he had forgotten about me - that's why no letters came. But one day I got back home from work at a timber plant and my mum had

burned all his earlier letters, poems and pictures, including our wedding photographs. She told me this other man was coming to meet me and that I should go out with him, and if I was lucky he'd marry me. The world turned black for me. I wanted to die and I got a clothes line and went into the hayloft intending to hang myself."

She eventually relented, married her mother's choice and had five children with him.

Boris too remarried. In time, their respective spouses died. With the end of the Soviet Union, Anna was able to travel home. Then came the chance reunion.

Photo courtesy the TELEGRAPH

Chapter 8: Circumstantial Precision

James S. Hewett records that shortly after Dallas Theological Seminary was founded in 1924, it almost came to the point of bankruptcy.

All the creditors were going to foreclose at noon on a particular day. That morning they met in the president's office with Dr. Chafer for prayer that God would provide. In that prayer meeting was a man by the name of Harry Ironside.

When it was his turn to pray, he prayed in his characteristic manner: "Lord, we know that the cattle on a thousand hills are Thine. Please sell some of them and send us the money."

While they were praying, a tall Texan with boots on and an open collar stepped up to the business office and said, "I just sold two carloads of cattle in Fort Worth. I've been trying to make a business deal but it fell through, and I feel compelled to give the money to the seminary. I don't know if you need it or not, but here's the check!"

A little secretary took the check and, knowing how critical things were financially, went to the door of the prayer meeting and timidly tapped.

When she finally got a response, Dr. Chafer took the check out of her hand. It was exactly the amount of the debt! When he looked at the name, he recognized the cattleman in Fort Worth, and turning to Dr. Ironside said, "Harry, God sold the cattle!"

Elsewhere, Hewett tells us about the West Side Baptist Church in Beatrice, Nebraska.

Normally all of the good choir people came to church on Wednesday night to practice, and they tended to be early, well before the 7:30 starting time.

But one night, March 1, 1950, one by one, two by two, they all had excuses for being late.

Marilyn, the church pianist overslept on her after-dinner nap, so she and her mother were late. One girl, a high school sophomore, was having trouble with her homework. That delayed her, so she was late. One couple couldn't get their car started. They, and

those they were to pick up, were subsequently late.

All eighteen choir members, including the pastor and his wife, were late. All had good excuses. At 7:30, the time the choir rehearsal was to begin, not one soul was in the choir loft. This had never happened before.

But that night, the only night in the history of the church that the choir wasn't starting to practice at 7:30, was the night that there was a gas leak in the basement of the West Side Baptist Church. At precisely the time at which the choir would have been singing, the gas leak was ignited by the church furnace and the whole church blew up.

The furnace room was right below the choir loft.

John Maxwell tells of an incident in the life of Christopher Columbus. He was discouraged one day as he walked by a monastery. He was thirsty, so he went into the monastery for a drink of water, and he sat down.

As he was being refreshed with a drink of water,

an old monk listened to his story of how he wanted to go on an expedition to find another land.

That monk listened to that story. And when it was all over, Christopher Columbus went on. But that old monk was a personal friend of Queen Isabella. He went and convinced her to finance the expedition of Christopher Columbus.

The discovery of the Americas may have started with a drink of water in a monastery.

William Cowper (pronounced Cooper) was a Christian, but he had sunk to the depths of despair.

One foggy night he called for a horsedrawn carriage and asked to be taken to the London Bridge on the Thames River. He was so overcome by depression that he intended to commit suicide.

But after 2 hours of driving through the mist, Cowper's coachman reluctantly confessed that he was lost.

Disgusted by the delay, Cowper left the carriage and decided to find the London Bridge on foot.

After walking only a short distance, though, he discovered that he was at his own doorstep!

The carriage had been going in circles. Immediately he recognized the restraining hand of God in it all.

Convicted by the Spirit, he realized that the way out of his troubles was to look to God, not to jump into the river.

As he cast his burden on the Saviour, his heart was comforted.

With gratitude he sat down and penned these reassuring words: *"God moves in a mysterious way His wonders to perform; He plants His footsteps in the sea, and rides upon the storm. O fearful saints, fresh courage take, the clouds you so much dread are big with mercy, and shall break in blessings on your head."*

Years ago, a certain fellow worked as a carpenter. On one particular day, he was building some crates for the clothes his church was sending to

orphanages in China.

On his way home, he reached into his shirt pocket to find his glasses, but they were gone. When he mentally replayed his earlier actions, he realized what had happened; the glasses had slipped out of his pocket unnoticed and fallen into one of the crates, which he had nailed shut. His brand new glasses were heading for China!

The Great Depression was at its height and this man had six children. He had spent $20 for those glasses that very morning. He was upset by the thought of having to buy another pair. "It's not fair," he told God as he drove home in frustration. "I've been very faithful in giving of my time and money to your work, and now this."

Months later, the director of the orphanage was on furlough in the United States. He wanted to visit all the churches that supported him in China, so he came to speak one Sunday at the carpenter's small church in Chicago.

The missionary began by thanking the people for their faithfulness in supporting the orphanage.

"But most of all," he said, "I must thank you for the glasses you sent last year. You see, the Communists had just swept through the orphanage, destroying everything, including my glasses.

I was desperate. Even if I had the money, there was simply no way of replacing those glasses. Along with not being able to see well, I experienced headaches every day, so my co-workers and I were much in prayer about this.

Then your crates arrived. When my staff removed the covers, they found a pair of glasses lying on top. The missionary paused long enough to let his words sink in.

Then, still gripped with the wonder of it all, he continued: "Folks, when I tried on the glasses, it was as though they had been custom made just for me! I want to thank you for being a part of that."

The people listened, happy for the miraculous glasses. But the missionary surely must have confused their church with another, they thought. There were no glasses on their list of items to be sent overseas.

But sitting quietly in the back, with tears

streaming down his face, an ordinary carpenter realized the Master Carpenter had used him in an extraordinary way.

Many years ago I was escorting a spinster aunt of mine safely to her bed-sitter home one night.

As we walked down the ramp to an underground walkway beneath a railway line I asked her why she was looking so glum. She explained that she had an electricity bill due and didn't know how she could scrape together enough money to pay it.

It was then that I spied a few banknotes weighted down with a pile of coins on a ledge at the entrance to the tunnel.

I asked her how much the bill was, picked up the money and handed it to her. She counted it and it was exactly the amount she needed, to the penny.

Our voices soon echoed in the tunnel as we thanked God for his providence.

On a certain occasion, I was in Numinbah (Queensland) where my wife and I were staying at the Log Cabin Campsite as volunteers for a couple of weeks while the regular caretakers were on holiday.

One weekend we were hosts for a Ministers' Retreat.

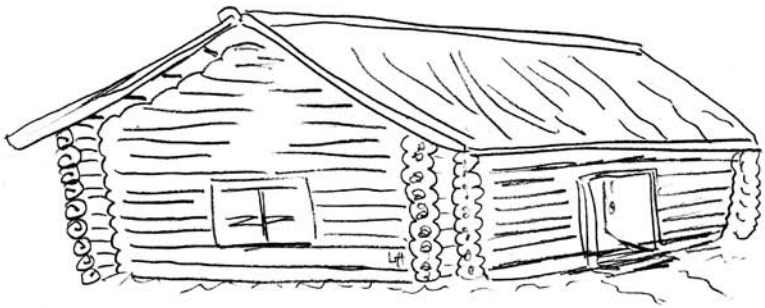
Late at night we had a problem with the water supply (we used rainwater pumped from a bore, filtered and pumped up to be stored in a tank on the hillside in the overgrown rainforest above the campsite).

With the aid of a small torch (flashlight), I climbed the hill though the dense forest to repair a fault in the waterline. It was easy to trace the meandering path while going uphill on this moonless night as the torch lit up the slope above me. However, I wondered how I would be able to easily find my way down again in the dark with only the weak torchlight to guide me.

Once I had repaired the fault by torchlight, I turned to make my descent in the dark and the torchlight died.

As my eyes adjusted to the pitch darkness, I was surprised to see that as I had earlier climbed uphill, where the torchlight had shone, it had fallen upon rows of tiny mushroom-like fungi that now glowed a phosphorescent path down the slope. All I had to do was follow the row of tiny "lights".

As I returned to the campsite, I thanked the Creator for His guidance, while remembering the words of the Psalmist, "Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path" (Psalm 119:105).



Chapter 9: Omnipresent Coincidences

"And there went forth a wind from the Lord, and brought quails from the sea, and let them fall by the camp, as it were a day's journey on this side, and as it were a day's journey on the other side, round about the camp, and as it were two cubits high upon the face of the earth.

And the people stood up all that day, and all that night, and all the next day, and they gathered the quails: he that gathered least gathered ten homers: and they spread them all abroad for themselves round about the camp" (Numbers 11:31-32).

Research into the migratory habits of quail in the Middle East makes the miracle of the Lord's provision all the more exciting. Each autumn, the birds fly from central Europe to Turkey.

There they prepare for a crossing of the Mediterranean. The flight across the ocean is done in a single flight at a very high speed. Any bird that falters falls into the sea.

When the birds approach the land, they drop down in altitude but maintain their high speed. As soon as they are over the coastland they land exhausted and completely drained. They lie motionless for hours while they regain their strength.

For years Bedouins who lived near the coast harvested the easy prey. Recently a law was passed and enforced which prohibited quail trapping.

The amazing thing about the biblical account of the provision of the quail is that the birds must have kept flying until they reached the wilderness of Sinai. How did the quail know to fly on farther after their already exhausting flight? Only the Lord who created them could have pressed them on

The author Warren Miller tells of a stormy night when a certain Father O'Malley was called to the hospital in Auburn, California. Here he heard the confession of a Tom, a dying alcoholic who reluctantly shared the following story:

He said, "I worked as a switchman on the railroad all my life, until I retired a few years ago and

moved up here to the woods. Thirty-two years, two months and 11 days ago, I was working in Bakersfield on a night kind of like tonight."

Tom's face became intense as the words began to tumble out. "It happened during a bad winter storm with a lot of rain, 50-mile-an-hour winds and almost no visibility. It was two nights before Christmas and to push away the gloom, the whole yard crew drank all through the swing shift. I was drunker than the rest of them, so I volunteered to go out in the rain and wind and push the switch for the northbound 8:30 freight [train]."

Tom's voice dropped almost to a whisper as he went on. "I guess I was more drunk than I thought I was, because I pushed that switch in the wrong direction. At 45 miles an hour that freight train slammed into a passenger car at the next crossing and killed a young man, his wife and their two daughters.

Tom went on to say, "I have had to live with my being the cause of their deaths every day since then."

There was a long moment of silence as Tom's confession of this tragedy hung in the air.

After what seemed like an eternity, Father O'Malley gently put his hand on Tom's shoulder and said very quietly, "If I can forgive you, God can forgive you, because in that car were my mother, my father and my two older sisters."

Coincidences are everywhere.

Would you like to believe that Abraham 'just happened' to find a ram caught in a thicket by his horns at the moment he needed a replacement sacrifice on one of the mountains in the land of Moriah. "And Abraham lifted up his eyes, and looked, and behold behind him a ram caught in a thicket by his horns: and Abraham went and took the ram, and offered him up for a burnt offering in the stead of his son" (Genesis 22:13).

There was an atheist in the vicinity of the home of a popular English Baptist pastor in the 1800s, Charles Spurgeon, and the atheist was very ugly to anyone who believed the Bible.

Spurgeon asked the Lord to direct him in what he should read for morning devotions. Then he seemed strongly impressed to read the book of Joel in its entirety.

When he came to Joel 3, he read the third verse: "And sold the girl for wine." Whereupon, Mr. Spurgeon checked his concordance to see how many times the word "girl" occurred in the Bible. To his great surprise, he found the word only occurred once.

A little later he thought he would take a walk. About a block-and-a-half away he looked up and there was the atheist's house. He went up and knocked.

The atheist growled, "Well, what do you want?"

"I would like to read the Bible to you," Spurgeon replied.

"The atheist began his usual abuse, then suddenly stopped and said, "Will you tell me how often the word 'girl' is in the Bible?"

Mr. Spurgeon answered, "Once."

The atheist then said, "Tell me where it is found

and I will let you in."

Spurgeon replied, "Joel 3:3."

The atheist then said, "Tell me before I let you in, how did you know it?"

Mr. Spurgeon answered, "I haven't known it [for more than] two hours. In my morning devotions I read the book of Joel."

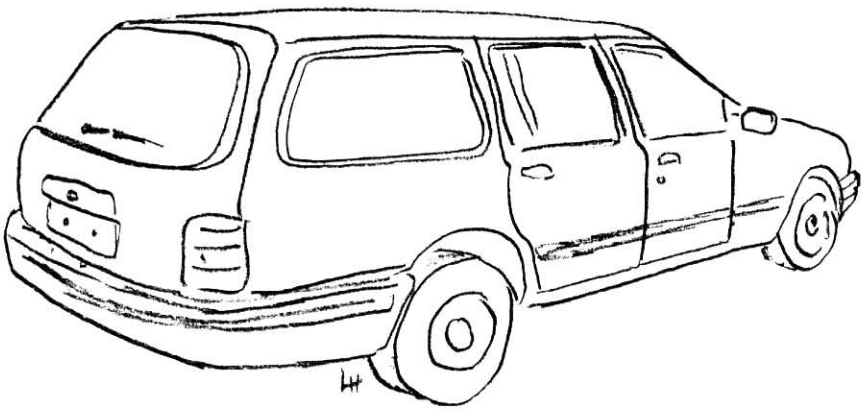
Then Mr. Spurgeon stepped in, and in half an hour the atheist was on his knees asking God to forgive his sins.

The poet Robert Bly confessed, "You can wander into the wrong classroom, and hear great poems lovingly spoken by the wrong professor. And you find your soul..."

The context is his poem 'People Like Us':

There are more like us. All over the world
There are confused people,
who can't remember
The name of their dog when they wake up,

and people
Who love God but can't remember where
He was when they went to sleep. It's
All right. The world cleanses
itself this way.
A wrong number occurs to you
in the middle
Of the night, you dial it,
it rings just in time
To save the house.
And the second-story man
Gets the wrong address,
where the insomniac lives,
And he's lonely, and they talk,
and the thief
Goes back to college.
Even in graduate school,
You can wander into the wrong classroom,
And hear great poems lovingly spoken
By the wrong professor.
And you find your soul,
And greatness has a defender,
and even in death
you're safe.



Chapter 10: Bordering on the Miraculous

In June 2023, I was out for an exercise and companionship walk with my wife Rosemary and I saw an unusual piece of plastic on the footpath.

Being the ever-curious one, I picked it up to look at it. I wondered what it was used for, as it was very small, shaped like a miniature bottle cork on one end and with a small round knob on the other.

I purposed to put it in the rubbish bin when I got home, but I forgot, and it was still in my hand when I reached my outdoor workbench. I placed it on the bench and promptly forgot about it.

Several days later I was using a rental car, a hatch-back wagon, and in the boot there is a shelf suspended from the boot lid with two elastic straps.

This shelf is designed to shield the contents of the boot from view when the boot is closed.

A previous renter had broken one of the fasteners and had repaired it with, of all things, what

looked like chewing gum or some other adhesive, and it was coming off.

As I hadn't noticed it when I signed the rental agreement, I was concerned that I would be held responsible for the cost of its repair when I returned the vehicle at the end of the rental period.

I examined the broken fitting and I immediately knew why the piece of plastic that I had picked up just a few days prior was not in the rubbish bin.

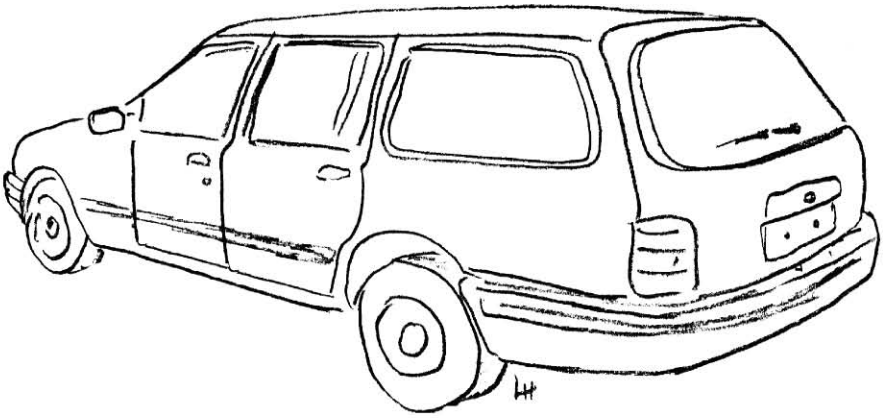
This plastic plug with a knob on the end was identical to the original fitting and was easily clipped into place to substitute with the broken one.

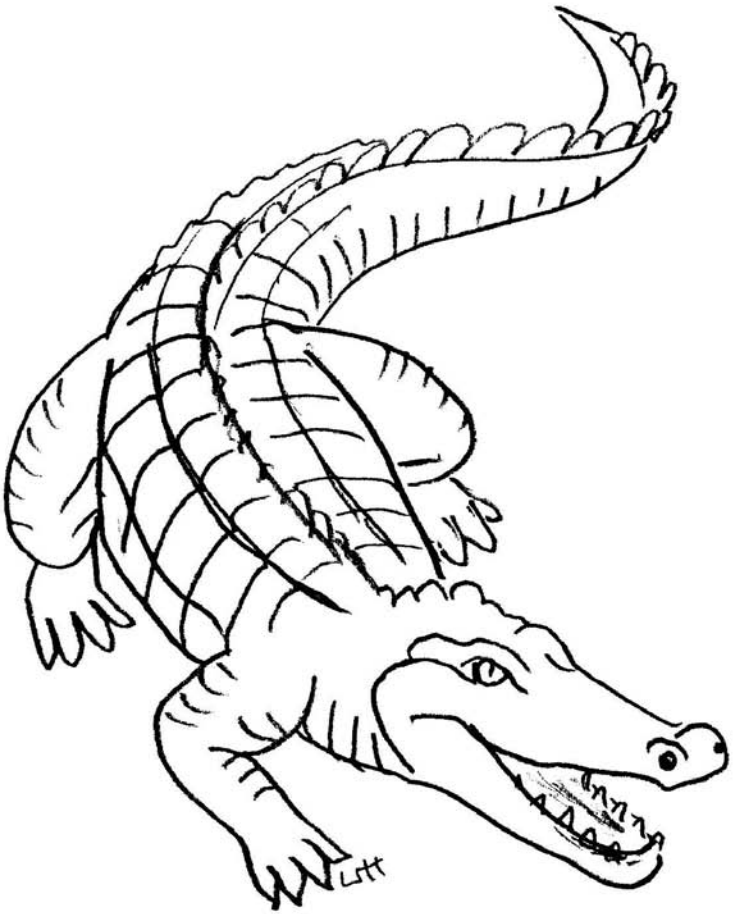
There is no such thing as a coincidence that borders on the miraculous. It is either Gods intervention or it is not.

My lack of higher mathematical ability cannot fathom the chances of this being a coincidence. I believe that this could not possibly have occurred without divine intervention and I thanked God for his concern with the minutia of our lives.

Let me assure you that God, the Almighty

creator of our vast universe and beyond, is intimately concerned with the minutia of your life too.





Chapter 11: How Did That Happen?

Down in Brazil, Maria, a girl who had recently become a Christian, stepped carefully down the well-worn path of the river bank.

She had come to get water. usually she found other women at the water's edge, but this day she was alone. As she stooped to dip the pot into the stream, she happened to glance to one side - and froze with horror.

From the bush on the bank not fifty feet away, a large crocodile emerged, stalking to attack. There was no time to run away or jump into the river - what should she do? "Lord, save me!" she cried.

Instantly as the crocodile dashed at her she found herself heaving her water pot with all her might into its open mouth. Distracted, it let her escape.

Seeing her rushing home almost out of breath, Maria's relatives quickly gathered around her to find out what was the matter.

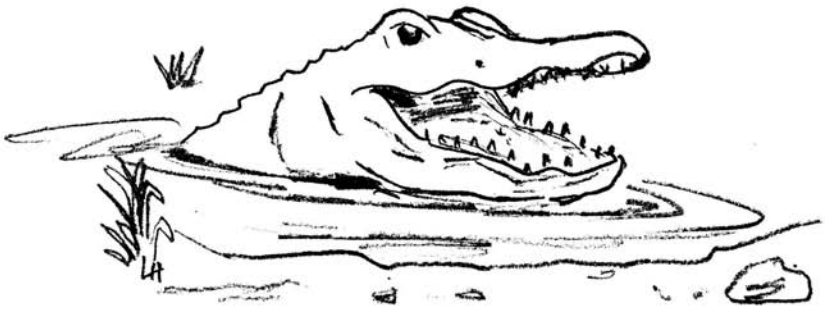
Her enthusiasm knew no bounds as she told of her miraculous escape until she noticed that no one seemed to believe her.

She was a new Christian, and if her relatives didn't believe her, certainly the townsfolk wouldn't, and they would not think much of a Christianity whose followers told such lies.

Maria at first was heartbroken, but she committed the matter to the Lord.

Ten days later she was walking back to the spot where she had nearly lost her life. But this time a big crowd had gathered. They were listening to a couple of fishermen who had a story to tell.

She arrived in time to hear one of them say, "Yes, we found a big dead crocodile decaying on the sand down the river. And we found a water pot in its throat. It had choked to death.



Chapter 12: Coincidence Chain

The Reader's Digest, December 1954 edition, shared the following story:

'A young minister had been called to serve at an old church that at one time had been a magnificent edifice in a wealthy part of town.

Now the area was in a state of decline and the church was in bad shape. Nevertheless, the pastor and his wife were thrilled with the church and believed they could restore it to its former magnificence.

When the minister took charge of the church early in October 1948, he and his wife immediately went to work painting, repairing and attempting to restore it. Their goal was to have the old edifice looking its best for Christmas Eve services.

Just two days before Christmas, however, a storm swept through the area, dumping more than an inch of rain. The roof of the old church sprung a leak just behind the altar. The plaster soaked up the water as if it were a sponge and then crumbled, leaving a

gaping hole in the wall.

Dejected, the pastor and his wife looked at the defaced wall. There was obviously no chance to repair the damage before Christmas. Nearly three months of hard work had been washed way. Yet the young couple accepted the damage as God's will and set about cleaning up the damp debris.

It was a depressed minister and his wife who attended a benefit auction for the church youth group that afternoon. One of the items put of for bid was an old gold-and-ivory-colored lace tablecloth, nearly fifteen feet long.

Seized with an inspiration, the pastor was the high bidder at $6.50. His idea was to hang the orange cloth behind the altar to cover the ragged hole in the wall.

On the day before Christmas, snowflakes mingled with the howling wind. As the pastor unlocked the church doors, he noticed an older woman standing at the nearby bus stop. He knew the bus wouldn't be there for at least half an hour, so he invited her inside to keep warm.

She wasn't from the neighborhood, she explained. She had been in the area to be interviewed for a job as a governess to the children of a well-known wealthy family. She had been a war refugee, her English was poor and she didn't get the job.

Head bowed in prayer, she sat in the pew near the back of the church. She paid no attention to the pastor, who was hanging the tablecloth across the unsightly hole. When the woman looked up and saw the cloth she rushed to the altar.

"It's mine!" she exclaimed. "It's my banquet cloth!"

Excitedly she told the surprised minister its history and even showed him her initials embroidered in one corner.

She and her husband had lived in Vienna, Austria, and had opposed the Nazis before the Second World War. They decided to flee to Switzerland, but her husband said they must go separately. She left first. Later she heard that he had died in a concentration camp.

Touched by her story, the minister insisted that

she take the cloth. She thought about it for a moment but said no, she didn't need it any longer, and it did look pretty hanging behind the altar. Then she said good-bye and left.

In the candlelight of the Christmas Eve services, the tablecloth looked even more magnificent. The white lace seemed dazzling in the flickering light of the candles, and the golden threads woven through it were like the brilliant rays of a new dawn.

As members of the congregation left the church, they complimented the pastor on the services and on how beautiful the church looked.

One older gentlemen lingered, admiring the tablecloth, and as he was leaving he said to the minister:

"It's strange. Many years ago my wife -- God rest her -- and I owned such a tablecloth. She used it only on very special occasions. But we lived in Vienna then."

The night air was freezing, but the goosebumps on the pastor's skin weren't caused by the weather. As calmly as he could, he told the man about the

woman who had been to the church that very afternoon.

"Can it be," gasped the old man, tears streaming down his cheeks," that she is alive? How can I find her?"

The pastor remembered the name of the family who had interviewed the woman. With the trembling old man at his side, he telephoned the family and learned her name and address.

In the pastor's old car they drove to her home on the other side of town. Together they knocked on her apartment door. When she opened it, the pastor witnessed the tearful, joyful and thrilling reunion of husband and wife.

Some people would call it an extremely lucky chance happening, the result of a hole in the church wall, an old tablecloth, a pastor's ingenuity in solving a problem and so on. But the combination of events was far too complex for it to have been merely "coincidence."

If one link in the fragile chain of events had been broken, the husband and wife might never have found each other. If the rain hadn't come, if the church

roof hadn't leaked, if the pastor had decided not to go to the auction, if the woman hadn't been looking for a job or standing on that corner at just the right time…the list of ifs is virtually endless.

It was simply God's will. And, as it has been said many times, He works in mysterious ways.'

James Simeon in '*The Evangel*' magazine tells us that the American Bible Society reported the story of a lady who wanted to do something special for the Lord and decided to give away Bibles.

While looking for someone to give a Bible to, she happened on a man building a block wall. The lady discovered he had never owned a Bible and offered him one, writing his name in it.

The man was too embarrassed to refuse the Bible. But when the Bible lady left, he said, "I'll never read this Bible, and I'll make sure no one else does either."

He placed the Bible behind one of the blocks and finished the wall around it. He was certain that

Bible would be hidden forever.

Years later, an earthquake struck the area. An inspector checking the damage the earthquake did, found a crack in the wall.

He saw the Bible the stonemason had hidden in the wall. The inspector carefully removed the Bible and took it home with him. That evening he studied the Word of God for the first time.

Soon the inspector was on his knees, thanking Jesus for dying for him. The inspector yielded his life to his Saviour and became a Bible distributor for the Bible Society of Spain.

Emile Rousseau, Jr. in '*Proclaim*' magazine picked up the story: One day the former inspector came on a stonemason and offered him a Bible at a very low cost.

The man told the Bible salesman he had sealed the only Bible he ever had in a wall. The distributor drew from his pocket that very Bible, glanced at the flyleaf, and told the stonemason his name.

The startled labourer sat down and listened to the distributor's story. Then he, too, decided to have a

closer look at this Book.

The power of God's Word was made evident again as the stonemason became a believer. He also became a missionary and laboured faithfully for his Lord for many years.

Lilian Whitfield wrote in 'Quora Digest': A 14 year old girl works in her parents' candy store. One day a 12 year old boy and his father come in to buy a newspaper. The 12 year old boy instantly falls in love.

Everyday, for more than two years, without ever missing a day, the young boy came into the candy store and bought a Hershey bar.

Each Hershey bar had a small, barely noticeable sticker with the name of the store on it. He was so shy that it was hard for him to even speak when he was near her.

After more than two years of buying Hershey bars everyday, the girl he was in love with was gone.

He continued to go in for a few weeks but it

became obvious to him that she was no longer working there. The young boy was devastated. He could think of nothing but this beautiful girl.

Many years later, the young boy, now a young man, goes to college out of state.

One day, while walking on campus, he notices a student on a bench crying, he goes over to ask if she's okay. She told him that she is not okay.

He put his books down on the bench, sat down next to her and tried to make her feel better, but she was very upset.

She wouldn't tell him details but she made it very clear that she thought the guy she was dating loved her and today somehow she found that wasn't true.

As the young boy left to go to class, he left his history notebook on the bench. The young woman, still crying, opened his history, loose leaf notebook so she can get his name and maybe a class schedule so she can return it to him.

She found no name or class schedule, and there was not one note written from any school subject. What

she did find was 763 Hershey wrappers, with love letters written on the back of each one. Each Hershey wrapper had a small sticker with the name and address of her parents' candy store, the same store she worked in as a young girl. The love letters were all written to her!!! She continued to cry, even harder now, but they were clearly different tears.

This story is being told these days, by another 14 year old girl (Lilian Whitfield) who works in the same candy store. She is telling her customers the story of how her grandparents met about 60 years ago.

Only by a happy coincidence did the names of the true authors of the song "Silent Night" come to light, thirty-six years after they wrote it.

The story begins in 1818 in a church in the little Austrian town of Oberndorf. Shortly before Christmas Eve, a mouse ate a hole in the leather bellows of the church organ, effectively silencing it.

The itinerant organ mender was not due in town for months, and music was needed for the Christmas

Eve service.

In three and one-half hours, Franz Gruber, the organist, composed music for a poem written by Josef Mohr, a priest. It began *"Stille Nacht, Heilige Nacht"* ("Silent Night, Holy Night").

On Christmas Eve, the two men sang their composition accompanied by a guitar and children's chorus. They were a great success.

The following May, when the organ mender turned up, Gruber gave him a copy of the song, which the man then circulated in his travels.

By 1831, thirteen years later, the Strasser family quartet was billing "Silent Night" one of their numbers, as a Tyrolean folk song by "authors unknown."

Time went by, and soon the now-popular song was being attributed to several famous composers.

In 1854, the leader of the king's orchestra in Berlin wrote to the choir director of the Benedictine school in Salzburg, asking for a copy of "Silent Night" by Michael Haydn, brother of the more famous composer Franz Joseph Haydn. The choir director asked

a student-who just happened to be Felix Gruber, Franz Gruber's son-to find a copy.

And maybe you can guess the rest.

Chapter 13: Coin of Coincidence

Like a coin, there are two sides to coincidence.

The first is not looking for eldritch happenstance: (coincidence through supernatural intervention) when miracles are all around us, and the other side is attributing every circumstantial coincidence to the Divine.

Firstly is it important to the growth of our relationship with God to actively look for His working in our lives.

Anthony de Mello tells of a man who was lost in a desert.

Later, when describing his ordeal to his friends, he told how, in sheer despair, he had knelt down and cried out to God to help him.

"And did God answer your prayer?" he was asked.

"Oh, no! Before He could, an explorer appeared and showed me the way."

In 1895, Clara H Scott (1841-1897) wrote,

"Open my eyes, that I may see glimpses of truth Thou hast for me; place in my hands the wonderful key that shall unclasp and set me free. Silently now I wait for Thee, ready, my God, Thy will to see; open my eyes, illumine me, Spirit Divine!

Open my ears that I may hear voices of truth Thou sendest clear; and while the wave-notes fall on my ear, everything false will disappear. Silently now I wait for Thee, Ready, my God, Thy will to see; Open my ears, illumine me, Spirit Divine!

Open my mouth, and let me bear gladly the warm truth everywhere; open my heart, and let me prepare love with Thy children thus to share. Silently now I wait for Thee, Ready, my God, Thy will to see; Open my heart, illumine me, Spirit Divine!"

Archbishop Temple confessed, "When I pray, coincidences happen. When I do not, they don't."

Maltbie D. Babcock (1858-1901) wrote,

"Back of the loaf is the snowy flour,
And back of the flour the mill,
And back of the mill is the wheat and the shower,
And the sun and the Father's will."

"I will lift up mine eyes unto the hills, from whence cometh my help.
My help cometh from the Lord, which made heaven and earth.
He will not suffer thy foot to be moved: he that keepeth thee will not slumber.
Behold, he that keepeth Israel shall neither slumber nor sleep.
The Lord is thy keeper: the Lord is thy shade upon thy right hand.
The sun shall not smite thee by day, nor

the moon by night.
The Lord shall preserve thee from all evil:
he shall preserve thy soul.
The Lord shall preserve thy going out and
thy coming in from this time forth, and even
for evermore" (Psalm 121).

John Boykin in Christianity Today magazine, warned us about the other side of the coincidence coin.

He wrote, "Reading God's hand into circumstances can be an evasion of genuine commitment to being His person in them. It can be an insidious alternative to giving Him your heart — because it keeps your attention directed outward rather than inward, where His chisel bites. ...

We have elevated coincidence to the status of miracle, and the interpretation of coincidence to gospel. We can routinely ask God to intervene in our circumstances while hoping He'll keep His nose out of inner things like our spiritual indifference and pride."

President U. S. Grant was dying. He was attended by his physician and J. P. Newman, a Methodist minister. When he temporarily revived from a coma, Newman said, "It's Providence! It's Providence!" "No," said the doctor, "it was the brandy."

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